

Williston Herald

WHS to offer electronics through distance ed

By Amanda Luchsinger, Lifestyles Editor

"Don't get stuck doing the same thing every day; find a job that gives you variety and the chance to change and grow."

Electronics teacher Joel Gustafson of Bismarck started his demonstration of a distance education electronics class yesterday at Williston High School on an energetic note, motivating students to think about different career opportunities.

Gustafson was in town giving students a preview of what they can expect if they chose to enroll in a new electronics curriculum that will be offered through distance education next year at WHS.

"He did such a good job of talking to the kids about the shortage of qualified, trained people in electronics fields, both in North Dakota and internationally," said Northwest Region Tech Prep Coordinator Jennie Granrud. "We're not graduating enough people with skills that these careers require."

Granrud became aware of a distance education electronics program being offered in 12 high schools in western South Dakota, which is very similar to Northwest North Dakota.

"It's been so successful that 500 high school students have already completed one or more electronics classes," Granrud said of the program, which has been offered for about five years in western South Dakota. "Tech Prep is putting dollars behind this in an attempt to bring distance ed models like the one in South Dakota, to Western North Dakota. We're trying to bring in more career and technical classes to our region, which has no electronics programs."

According to Granrud, whose position is housed at Williston State College, Minot and Bismarck are the closest towns to here with high school electronics programs. Granrud noted a significant difference in the number of vocational opportunities in Western North Dakota high schools compared to those other regions.

Williston High School has already signed on with the electronics program, which will be offered through distance education starting in the fall, under the direction of Gustafson. Students can start enrolling for that this spring. Also, Gustafson will come to Williston this summer and teach a class face-to-face.

According to Granrud, there is room for one more school in the region to acquire the program, in addition to WHS. Some Ray High School students also sat in on the demonstration yesterday, as the principal there is interested in the program, but has not committed to anything yet. Granrud also noted that two schools in the Bottineau area may begin offering the distance education electronics curriculum as well.

In the electronics technology courses, students will learn about electrical theory, Ohm's law, series and parallel circuits, tools and test equipment. Also, each student will complete the OSHA 10-Hour Safety Course. Granrud said that the program will start with at least one class, with possible development of three classes total.

Teaching software used in the class is by NIDA, which Granrud said is the same software used at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center on Lake Michigan, as well as being used world-wide to teach electronics.

The North Dakota State College of Science in Wahpeton and Bismarck State College are assisting in creating the curriculum for the distance ed classes at WHS.

"They are the two public 2-year schools in the state that offer electronics programs," Granrud said. "With their help, we're building this from the ground up so it can be an articulated class," meaning that students

can receive college credit for the classes and have them appear on official transcripts after a small office fee is paid.

Tech preps are working with the ND CTA (Current Technical Education) to fund the program. In addition, they are hopeful that businesses and industries that need employees with electronics backgrounds will help cover some of the modest costs involved with trainers.

Also, progress in area schools may come about through working with the Great Northwest JPA (Joint Powers Agreement), which Granrud said was formed just over a year ago in an effort to join together small schools to offer more student services, among other things.

"The (North Dakota) Legislature is requiring (the JPA) to offer student services. My tech prep goal and their requirement to offer more match," Granrud noted of working with the JPA.

The Great Northwest JPA is made up of 14 schools in the region, with Alexander Principal Murry Kline heading up the administration.

Granrud said career exploration classes offered through distance education is also in the works.